

Education Cabinet

New educational program empowers Kentucky schools to go green

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FRANKFORT, Ky. – Twenhofel Middle School students in Kenton County are learning it is easy being green as they get an education in conservation. Their school building itself serves as a classroom as they monitor the school's energy usage, study in naturally lit classrooms and use science labs powered by solar panels.

They showed off their school – one of Kentucky's first "green" schools – as the Kentucky Environmental Education Council (KEEC) and the Kentucky Department of Education, with Kentucky Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet Secretary Teresa Hill, toured the school Friday to launch Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools (KGHS). This program encourages schools to teach and follow healthy and environmentally sound practices.

Public and private schools across the state are invited to join the voluntary program. KGHS provides tools to empower students and staff to help schools operate at peak efficiency while simultaneously following core content curriculum.

"Emerging studies have found a significant correlation between the condition of school buildings and student health and academic performance," said Maria Zoretic, KGHS program coordinator. "KGHS allows students and teachers to assess and identify strategies that will improve the quality of the school environment."

Students learn to take personal responsibility for the sustainability and health of their school environment. The Web-based, student-centered program teaches leadership skills, problem-solving techniques and is aligned with state standards, Zoretic said.

Students and staff may conduct school environmental inventories in nine areas: energy, indoor air quality, green spaces, hazardous chemicals, water, health & nutrition, transportation, solid waste and instructional leadership (the last to be completed by school faculty).

Each inventory contains questions that are aligned to Kentucky's core content at each grade level. Web sites and other resources also are aligned to the questions to help students with research and improvement projects.

"This alignment demonstrates how environmental education can complement rather than complicate curricula," Zoretic said.

In addition to the Web-based resources, each school will be paired with a natural resources partner and a business partner.

By identifying and implementing healthy, safe and environmentally sound practices, a school may become a Green and Healthy School. Some benefits a school may experience are

- Improved health and attendance
- Efficient use of energy, water and other vital resources
- Reduction of operating costs due to efficiency of resources
- Increased sense of ownership by teachers, students and parents
- Student involvement in rigorous, relevant and curriculum-aligned learning

KEEC will provide free in-school training to participating schools. The council also will recognize schools' achievements each May at a ceremony in Frankfort.

"The Green and Healthy Schools program not only provides multidisciplinary learning experiences," said Jane Eller, executive director of KEEC, "but green schools present unique opportunities to

create a new generation of energy-smart, environmentally literate citizens.”

The Kentucky Environmental Education Council and the Kentucky Department of Education jointly sponsor KGHS. Both are agencies in the Kentucky Education Cabinet. The program was designed with the help of a task force of citizens from the environmental, education and business communities.

For more information about the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools program, visit <http://www.greenschools.ky.gov/> or call (800) 882-5271.